

## **Africa, Global Human Rights and International Relations Subcommittee**

### **Zimbabwe: Prospects for Democracy After The March 2005 Elections**

#### **Excerpts of Remarks of Rep. Chris Smith**

**April 21, 2005**

The Subcommittee will come to order. I am pleased to convene this hearing of the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights and International Operations. Today we will be looking at the prospects for democracy in one of the most troubled countries on the African continent, Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe celebrated the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its independence this past Monday, but most Zimbabweans had little to celebrate. In the words of the newspaper the *Zimbabwe Standard*, this southern African nation “is experiencing an unprecedented political and economic crisis.”

President Robert Mugabe, a hero of his country’s independence struggle, has been in power since April 18, 1980, and he claims the last 25 years have left him wiser. However, the record doesn’t support his claim.

Three-fourths of Zimbabweans eligible for work are unemployed. Many companies, including major exporters to the United States, have been forced to shut down due to the country’s economic dismantling. A disastrous land redistribution program has led to the collapse of the country’s agriculture sector. According to Catholic Relief Services, 400,000 agricultural jobs have been lost. And, while the continent of Africa is experiencing the highest economic growth in nearly a decade, Zimbabwe’s economy is contracting.

The Heritage Foundation’s Index of Economic Freedom rates Zimbabwe as “repressed,” based on uniformly poor economic policies. Freedom House lists Zimbabwe as “not free,” based on a severely restricted political process, which has included oppression of political opponents, significant limits on freedom of the press, and a string of manipulated elections. The World Bank Institute’s governance index rates Zimbabwe “poor” across the board in categories measuring the ability of citizens to express themselves politically, to rule of law, to control of corruption.

One would think, then, that the people of Zimbabwe would rise up and select new leadership to restore what was once one of the most advanced nations in Africa to its rightful position among the continent’s countries.

However, internal and external factors sometimes combine to make such a laudable goal very difficult to achieve. More than anyone else, President Mugabe has contributed to a climate of fear, and heightened even further explosive racial tensions in this nation, which was formerly ruled by a white minority regime. Rather than take the success he achieved in 1980 and build on it, President Mugabe has taken the repressive

path and has systematically violated the fundamental human rights of the people of Zimbabwe.

According to the U.S. Department of State's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, Zimbabwe's human rights conditions are among the worst. The report said, and I quote:

*"The Government's human rights record remained very poor, and it continued to commit numerous, serious abuses. President Mugabe and his ZANU PF party used intimidation and violence to maintain political power. A systematic, government sanctioned campaign of violence targeting supporters and perceived supporters of the opposition continued during the year. Security forces committed at least one extrajudicial killing. Ruling party supporters, with material support from the Government, continued their occupation of commercial farms, and in some cases killed, abducted, tortured, intimidated, raped, or threatened farm occupants. Security forces, government-sanctioned youth militias, and ruling party supporters tortured, raped, and otherwise abused persons perceived to be associated with the opposition; some persons died from their injuries. Prison conditions remained harsh and life threatening. Official impunity for ruling party supporters who committed abuses was a problem. Arbitrary arrest and detention remained problems, and lengthy pretrial detention emerged as a problem. Infringements on citizens' privacy continued. The Government continued its far reaching "fast track" resettlement program under which most large scale commercial farms were designated for seizure without fair compensation.*

*"The Government continued to restrict freedom of speech and of the press, academic freedom, freedom of assembly, and the right of association for political organizations. The Government at times restricted freedom of movement. Thousands of farm workers continued to be displaced internally due to the ongoing land resettlement policies, and the Government prevented international organizations and local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) from assisting them on some occasions. Opposition supporters were displaced by threats of violence. During the first half of the year, there were reports that the Government's Grain Marketing Board (GMB) routinely and publicly denied handouts of maize meal to suspected MDC supporters; there were no such reports during the second half of the year. The Government attacked and arrested members of civil society and human rights NGOs and accused the NGOs of sponsoring opposition political activity. Societal violence against women remained widespread, and discrimination against women and persons with disabilities, abuse of children, and child prostitution remained problems. There were occasional reports of trafficking in persons. The President and his Government promoted widespread*

*resentment against the white minority. The Government violated worker rights. Child labor was a problem.”*

Leadership does matter. The parliamentary election this March was a test of electoral reforms guided by regional standards. According to most assessments of the electoral process, this test was failed.

Even before the voting began, there were serious questions about whether a free and fair election was possible. Voting rolls allegedly carried hundreds of thousands of dead voters, apparently for use in rigging the election. Manipulation of district boundaries cut four pro-opposition constituencies in Harare and Bulawayo, while three new constituencies were created in areas favorable to the ruling party. The police and army are said to have contributed to more subtle intimidation of voters than in the past. Food aid reportedly was again used to coerce hungry voters to maintain the political status quo.

The opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) issued a report last week which detailed specific instances of fraud in the March legislative elections. In fact, the MDC has filed suit in the election court contesting results from 13 constituencies. It estimated that more than 133,000 voters were turned away from the polls without being able to cast their ballots. The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission still has not explained the addition or subtraction of thousands of votes from 72 of 120 constituencies.

Now that the election is over, there are reports of reprisals against opposition supporters. According to the *Zimbabwe Standard*, MDC supporters are being denied maize meal in rural Masvingo province as punishment for their suspected vote. If true, this does not bode well for reconciliation and progress in this troubled nation.

Externally, to judge when to apply quiet diplomacy and when stronger measures are needed, has proven elusive. In the months running up to President Bush's African tour in July 2003, both he and Secretary Powell made demands for Robert Mugabe to resign, and together put the Mugabe regime under intense pressure. This followed the signing into law of the Zimbabwe Democracy & Economic Recovery Act (ZDERA) passed by Congress in December 2001.

However, after a meeting in Pretoria with South Africa's President Mbeki in July 2003, President Bush rescinded his demands for change in Zimbabwe, and deferred to President Mbeki's 'quiet diplomacy' efforts, declaring that "he was an honest broker."

The U.S. has not fully applied economic and political sanctions called for in Congressional legislation, and recently reduced its levels of assistance to NGOs assisting with political party development and support to the opposition. These actions seem puzzling in light of Secretary Rice's naming of Zimbabwe as an "outpost of tyranny." In fact, Zimbabwe is the only "outpost" whose funding for democracy and governance programs has been cut.

In South Africa, President Thabo Mbeki and his political party, the ANC, have publicly supported Mugabe and the ZANU-PF, while privately attempting to facilitate contact between Zimbabwe's government and the opposition, focusing on convincing both parties to agree to constitutional and legal changes.

The wisdom of South Africa's policy approach must be questioned. The South African government, despite clear evidence to the contrary, claimed the elections were free and fair. There has been no measurable improvement – in fact, there has been a steady worsening - of the political and economic environment inside Zimbabwe over the past five years.

Not everyone in South Africa agrees with President Mbeki. Zimbabwe's democracy movement has the support of regional civil society, in particular South Africa's Congress of Trade Unions (COSATU) and its Council of Churches. The head of African Union observer mission called for an immediate investigation into the electoral fraud, and the opposition parties in South Africa which assisted with parliamentary election observer mission do not agree with the ANC's declaration that the elections were free and fair.

In this hearing, I look forward to a more thorough examination of how the United States can best bring about democratic change in Zimbabwe, help the country address its critical humanitarian needs, and restart the economic growth and prosperity its citizens so desperately need.

As his country reached a quarter century of independence, President Mugabe honored other African leaders, such as Sir Seretse Khama (SUR-RHETT-SAY COMMA), Botswana's founding father. One would hope he would follow the former Botswana leader's example in how to lead a nation.

Zimbabwe should be a leading example of successful industrialization and effective modern democratic leadership. Instead, it is increasingly an example of how to waste the human and natural resources of a nation.

Robert Mugabe was a hero to his people and to his fellow Africans for successfully standing up to racism and oppression. More than two decades later, however, he has so tarnished his image that it must now resemble the fictional portrait of Dorian Gray, showing an increasingly repugnant picture of a hero gone astray.